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It's the issue that counts — It's the language that counts

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The Maine Campus

The student newspaper of the University of Maine at Orono

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Our 76th year proudly serving the university community

The opinions expressed in this newspaper do not necessarily reflect
the opinions of the University of Maine at Orono.

It's the issue that counts

There are over 400,000 words in the English language. It is ridiculous to segregate seven, eight, or nine—or even one—of them as totally unsuitable for use in a newspaper. Acting as if certain four-letter words do not exist only adds to the titillating air that surrounds them when they do appear—as they will.

This week *The Campus* received several letters concerning the use of four-letter Anglo-Saxon words in last week's interview concerning lesbianism and homosexuality. Some in the university community said they were dismayed and shocked to find such words in the student newspaper. *The Campus* was accused of transgressing the boundaries of good taste and judgement by using "crude and graceless language."

Neither the *Campus* nor Carol Savoie is much given to the use of four-letter words. But we do feel justified using them in the context of last week's article because their use enhanced the points Carol made, and conveyed the meaning Carol meant to be conveyed.

When she said "shit" referring to the treatment gays receive from straight society, she was referring to the crude, graceless, demeaning, excretable and not-so-subtle experiences every homosexual faces every day.

Describing the loveless, impersonal ramming that passes as acceptable sex

merely because it is between heterosexual partners, Savoie used the word "fuck," juxtaposing it with an appeal for the acceptance of warm, loving human relationships, including homosexual ones.

In both instances, *The Campus* feels that the choice of words was not merely justified, but a good choice.

We regret, however, that the letters we received did nothing except castigate us for allegedly abusing language. We did not print the article in order to include several four-letter words. We seriously attempted to bring the subject of homosexuality before the community for consideration. The response we received was disappointing.

Two of the letters were from high administrators who could have effected discussion of homosexuality at UMO.

They could have responded to Savoie's charges that this institution reinforces stereotypes of gays as abnormal, perverted and extra-ordinary without examining the human aspects of homosexuality.

The letters were the first we've received from these administrators. Both letters failed to respond to the issues involved in the article. If anyone misused the language, we suggest it is the administration which used words only to remain silent.

Letters:

It's the language that counts

To the editor:

During the years I have been Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, I have never attempted to officially criticize and surely not to censor the writings and reportings in the Maine Campus. This reticence on my part was especially difficult during the late 1960's when I was personally taken to task by the paper and some of its contributors. My position was that the editor and the reporters for the newspaper should be free to express their social, political and economic ideas in their own way, as long as those expressions remained generally within the bounds of good taste and civility. With some exceptions, the Campus has remained within those boundaries.

I must, however, now violate my own self-imposed rules with reference to the April 12th edition of the newspaper. I am referring specifically to the "column" by Don Smith and the *Campus* interview entitled "Gay Lib. Spokeswoman."

With reference to the first item, I have no objections whatsoever to poking fun at University administrators and policies. It is, however, incumbent upon the writer to express his humor in ways which do not offend a sizable portion of his readers. If nothing else, to do otherwise would be to defeat one's own purposes.

The same may be said for the article on lesbianism. No one will, I think, argue that the subject is not a perfectly legitimate one for public

discussion, either as a campus phenomenon or in the wider context of general human behavior. The day has long since gone when matters of this kind were taboo. I do, however, object to the language used in several places in the article. In certain kinds of journalism such language would be acceptable. I am thinking here of books and articles devoted to this kind of "shock language" and which appeal to a specific segment of our community. But to use such language in a general purpose publication, the readers of which come from many segments of our society and a majority of whom I am certain would take exception to the use of such language, is uncalled for.

Indeed, I think a strong case can be made for arguing that it is incumbent upon the editors of a general purpose publication, aimed at a rather average cross section of American citizens, to adopt a style of reporting which seeks to avoid offending a sizable portion of that cross-section.

Perhaps I am wrong in my assumptions. Perhaps most of the University community are, in fact, not offended by that kind of language. I myself am so offended, and I would wager that a majority of the faculty and staff are equally offended. I am less certain as to the general student body, but suspect that they would agree.

John J. Nolde
Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

Critiques of *The Maine Campus* are held every Friday following publication at 1 p.m. in 102 Lord Hall. All readers are invited to attend, and comments are welcome.